



The Ames Intelligencer

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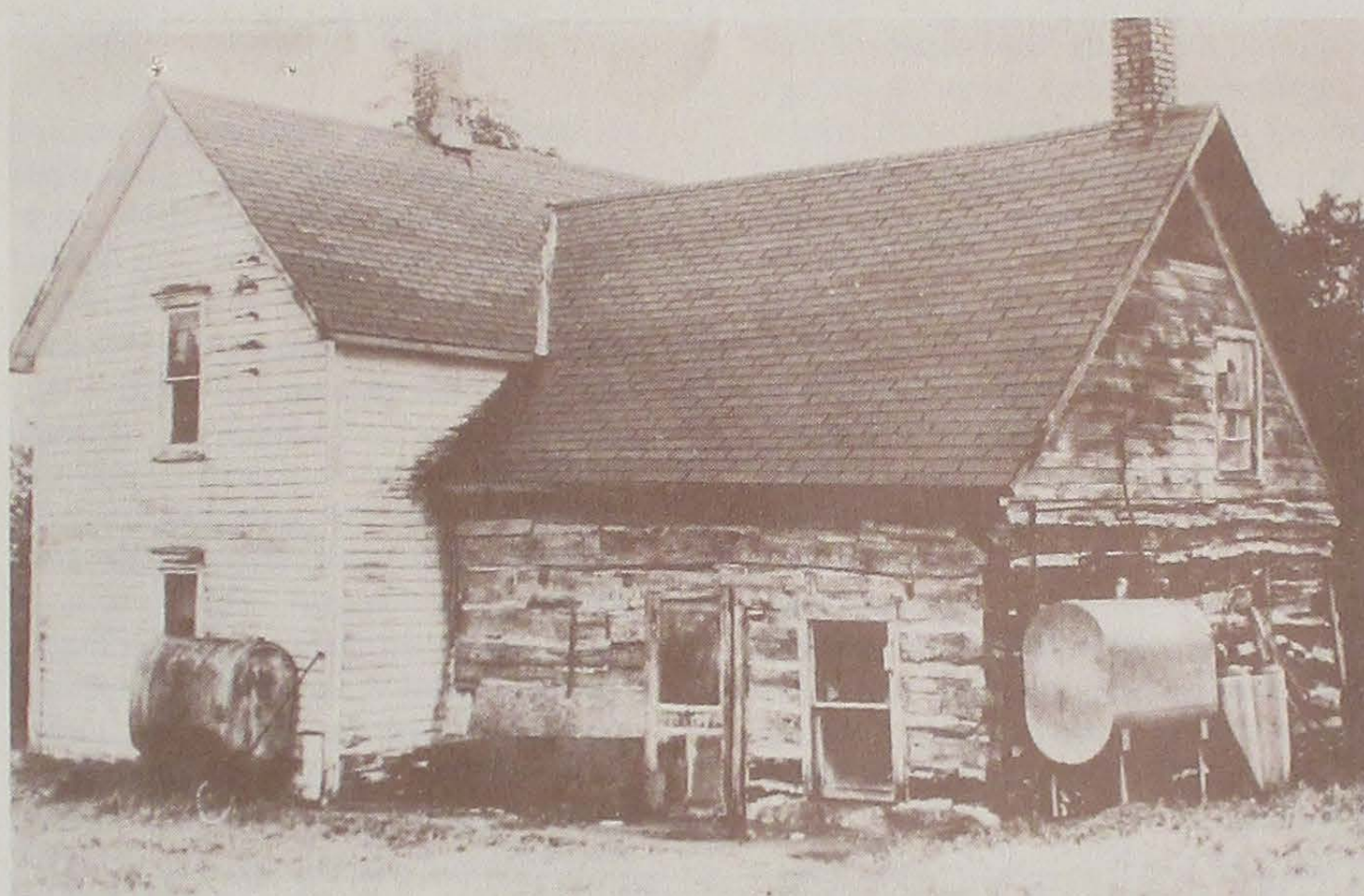
Two Historic Cabins Still Standing

by Farwell T. Brown

Midwest pioneer life meant log cabins. In the 1850s, the first settlers in this area built cabins, often not far from the Skunk River where timber was plentiful. Pioneers needed only two metal tools to build a log cabin - an ax to fell the trees and hew the logs and a wedge-shaped cleaving tool called a froe to fashion roof boards or shingles. The art of log cabin building is said to have been introduced by Swedish pioneers who first built log homes in a Delaware settlement in 1638. By the 1850s, it had become an American heritage.

In Story County, few log cabins have survived, but two that remain were probably built in the year 1854. One cabin that stands today on its original site is the Sharp cabin located northeast of Huxley. It was built by Story County pioneer Andrew Bard who settled in Section 13 of Palestine Township. A granddaughter of Bard's, Margaret Sharp, lived on the property from 1901 until her death in 1981. Roy Thomas, Sharp's cousin, resides there today in what is probably the very last of the original log cabins that remain standing in this area.

Andrew Bard, it appears from the record, settled on this site which was part of a parcel of land originally designated by the federal government as "University Land" before there was a university in Iowa. In 1869, Bard received a patent to the tract of land signed by Governor Samuel Merrill. The cabin was built in 1854 and has been the home of Bard and his descendants to this day. The original log house is still very much lived in, although a two-story frame



The Sharp log cabin, today the home of Roy Thomas, descendant of its builder, Andrew Bard, is located northeast of Huxley. The log portion of the home dates from 1854.

addition was built about the year 1900. The original log structure serves its present occupant as kitchen and dining room. The frame addition can be entered from the main level of the log house or from the loft reached by stairs in the corner of the ground floor. The original flooring in the Sharp cabin was milled at Swede's Point, now called Madrid, in Boone County.

Another log cabin still stands, but, unfortunately, it is no longer in the Ames area. The old "Boy Scout cabin," as it was known by Ames area Boy Scouts in the 1920s, was constructed about 1854 by Presley Craig who received his land patent from the U.S. Government on May 15, 1855. It was located in Section 15 of Franklin Township just off the

turn in the old stagecoach road that led to the nearby town of Bloomington two miles northeast of present-day Ames. Built of walnut logs, it stands today as a museum in a county park in western Iowa near the town of Missouri Valley.

The Craig cabin was moved to its present site in January 1938. An Ames *Tribune* story on January 21, 1938 by Art Johnson gives the account of the life of this cabin. It was moved by Preston Niles, son of Dr. W.B. Niles of Ames. Dr. Niles, an early graduate of the Iowa State Veterinary College, had long owned the land where the cabin stood. The cabin was carefully dismantled, the logs numbered, and the pieces transported to Missouri Valley where the son operated a

commercial orchard.

Dr. Niles was the man who had developed the first hog cholera serum and who had established the Federal Animal Industry Experiment Station just east of Ames in 1906. For several years, he had given local Boy Scouts permission to use the cabin and surrounding area for camping and exploration activities. The scouts named it "Camp Machacammac" (little house on the hill).

Many an Ames scout of 60 years ago can tell you of overnight stays in that cabin. The old stone fireplace kept them warm - at least on one side - as they soaked up some of the scouting lore of the day. Pioneer stories were related, along with a good measure of ghost stories, on many occasions.

Steep steps to the right of the fireplace led to the loft and the rough board bunks equipped with straw ticks. Sleep did not come easily for most boys of that age, especially on cold nights.

There was real nature lore all around. The trail of the old stagecoach road passed not far to the east of the cabin, and rock formations along the lively stream in the gorge-like ravine below the cabin to the north offered great opportunities for exploration. Many a fire-starting and cooking test was passed on the ridges or along the stream banks by Ames boys privileged to spend time at the old cabin.



The Presley Craig log cabin, built in 1854, was located northeast of Ames. It was known in the 1920s by Ames area Boy Scouts as "Camp Machacammac" or "Little House on the Hill."

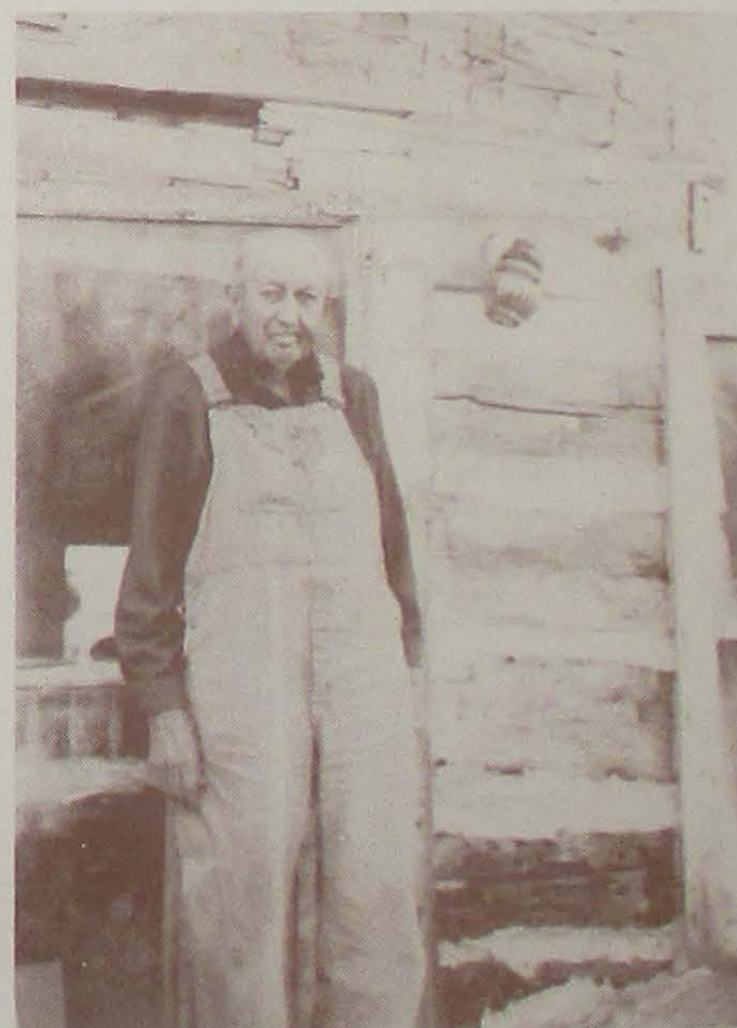
In the 1920s, there still remained several abandoned homes in what once had been the nearby town of Bloomington. The first Methodist Church in the Ames area still stood, as did the old Bloomington School, all within a quarter mile of the Boy Scout cabin. Today, the church building is gone, and only the dilapidated remains of the schoolhouse still stand. Preston Niles, now 87 and retired, tells of another cabin, known as the Boyce cabin, that was located just south of the Bloomington site. That cabin disappeared before the Boy Scout era.

According to Ethel Welliver, a present-day resident of Ames and a great-granddaughter of Presley Craig, her father, Charlie P. Craig, at one time, hoped to see the Craig cabin preserved in the Ames area with furnishings of the pioneer period. She adds that two of Craig's sons, Benjamine and Elisha, died in the Civil War and were among the first burials in the Ames Cemetery.

Both of these historical cabins were built ten years before Ames was laid out. And both are in remarkable condition considering that they have lived through more than 130 Iowa winters.



Billy Sunday Drive was recently designated by the Ames City Council for the previously unnamed frontage road east of South Duff Avenue at Airport Road. The Ames Heritage Association is planning to place a historical marker further east on the drive near the pioneer Cory/Sunday family cemetery. Billy Sunday, born in a cabin near this site, became a nationally-known evangelist and baseball player who reached his zenith shortly after World War I. Sunday died in 1935 and is buried in Chicago. Members of his family are buried in the Cory/Sunday cemetery located near the intersection of Highways 69 and 30.



Ray Thomas, descendant of pioneer Andrew Bard, stands in front of the 1854 Sharp cabin. Thomas resides in one of the last standing original log cabins in Story County.

Historic Landmark Passes From Local Scene

by Steve Lekwa, Ranger with the Story County Conservation Board

The prairie had only begun to show traces of green, although the wooded valley which cut through the sea of grass was nearing full leaf. The clear prairie stream which meandered along the valley had only recently receded from spring highwater, and pools and muddy areas remained along the many old channels now cut off as oxbow ponds.

The locals, when they were around, knew the stream as "Cha Ca Gua" and the time of the year as the "moon of cherries blooming." The hard times known as the "hunger moon," when winter supplies were running low and spring had not advanced enough to provide food, had just passed. Bellies were being filled with fresh greens, mushrooms, and migrating birds.

Many stately elms shared the banks of the Cha Ca Gua with assorted hackberries, walnuts, silver maples, cottonwoods, butternuts, and other moisture-loving trees. Their seeds drifted on the spring breezes and floated on the water. Two elm seeds came to rest near each other at the edge of an old stream channel and took root in the moist, rich, floodplain forest soil. They grew quickly into healthy saplings. One was a red elm; the other was a white elm.

There was a well-worn path near the two saplings which was used

most of the year by wild creatures living nearby, including elk and bison. It was these large game animals which brought the red man along the path each late summer and fall. Some were known as Sioux. Others were known as the Sac and Fox. They never really agreed on who had rights to the Cha Ca Gua hunting ground, and they sometimes left their dead along its banks after they met. Although most of the red men hunting in the valley had heard stories of white-skinned men far to the east, few had seen one, and no white man had ever passed by the two sturdy elm saplings near the bank of the Cha Ca Gua.

No one knows exactly how it happened, but those two elm trees grew together in a most unusual way. Local legend says that the Indians did it. These early residents often left messages for those who would come later. They had no written language to write messages, but they were masters at using whatever nature provided. It's entirely possible that a passing band of Indians tied the saplings together as a marker along their trail. It was also a common practice, at least for Woodland Indians like the Sac and Fox, to use some handy saplings as a framework for a quick overnight shelter. A few small trees would be tied together and a buffalo robe

draped over them. The flexible, still-rooted, and growing trees made a shelter no storm could blow down.

It's possible nature may have had a hand in the making of our old H-tree. Those saplings doubtlessly shared the soil with older trees. The old patriarchs died and fell from time to time. Their passing left room for young trees to reach for the sun, but sometimes only by growing out from under the heavy limbs of the dead giant. Such an event could have left a branch, or even the whole trunk, of one of the saplings pressed tightly against the other. No one came to cut up fallen trees for firewood back then, and a firm graft could have occurred long before the fallen tree rotted away.

Times were changing along the banks of our quiet prairie stream. The red men came less often, and only recently a small band of horse-mounted, white-skinned soldiers had passed a few miles west of a strange H-shaped pair of elms. They were full-grown trees, having known at least 50 summers. The mounted soldiers, known as dragoons, and their leaders, Nathan Boone, son of famous Daniel, and Albert Lea, hadn't heard of the H-tree and were only mildly aware of the Cha Ca Gua valley off to their east. The year was 1835, and they were intent on exploring the interior of a new land known as Iowa.



This early photograph of the "peculiar tree near Story City" appeared in W.O. Payne's *History of Story County* published in 1911. The photo was furnished by Clarke Pasley of Ames.



Erwin Thompson is shown sitting on the grafted limbs of the famous landmark in 1910. The photograph was loaned by Lillian Hanson of Ames.

The first white man to see the H-tree is lost to history, although he probably saw it some time in the next ten years as he followed an old Indian trail, looking for a good place to set up a homestead. It could have been a French-Canadian fur-trader. They were known as the voyageurs up north, but a few ranged far into the plains long before 1800. It could also have been Nathan Boone himself. He led the survey of the "neutral zone" dividing the warring Sioux and Sac and Fox Indians, crossing the Cha Ca Gua in Story County in 1832, three years before he led the U.S. Army Dragoons on their expedition.

From this time on, the story of the H-tree is history, both written and spoken. Names and places we know today were coming into the county. The beautiful Indian Cha Ca Gua, later spelled Chichaqua, become known to the white settlers as the Skunk River, and settlements such as Fairview, Sheffield, Bear Grove, and Bloomington had sprung up along its banks. The old Indian path formed the route of a new stagecoach road which connected the pioneer communities. The H-tree gained fame, and travelers often pointed it out as they passed.

The first settler to own the land surrounding the H-tree was Nathan Sheffield. He acquired 80 acres of land in the south half of the

southeast quarter of Section 30 at \$1.25 per acre for the sum of \$100 from the U.S. Government in June of 1855. That's the same year that Story City was founded. The Sheffield family owned the land until 1915 when Julius Knutson of Story City bought it. Julius sold it to Birtle Jackson in 1943, who sold it to Tom and Martha Olson in 1949. Martha sold the property to Albert and Irene Anderson in 1967. Their son, Curtis, owns the site today, although he leases it to the Story County Conservation Board as a canoe-greenbelt access.

Elm trees had been a major component of the floodplain forest since the hardwoods replaced the glacial coniferous forest between 5,000 and 10,000 years ago. By the 1960s, however, they began to disappear in the face of the spread of Dutch elm disease. White, or American, elms were the first to die. The red, or slippery, elms held on a few years longer. A few mature red elms are still hanging on today. But in the 1960s, the H-tree pair no longer had the vigor of youth to face the disease. The red elm half held on a few years longer than the white elm half, but by the dawn of the 1970s, only bare limbs greeted the summer sun.

Elms decompose rapidly when exposed to soil and moisture. Most dead elms fall in only a few years as their roots rot away. Their wood

was, and is, prized as firewood. The H-tree, however, stood fast even in death. The grafted red and white elms braced each other and stood against many years of storms and floods. Its respected place in local folklore saved it from chain saws.

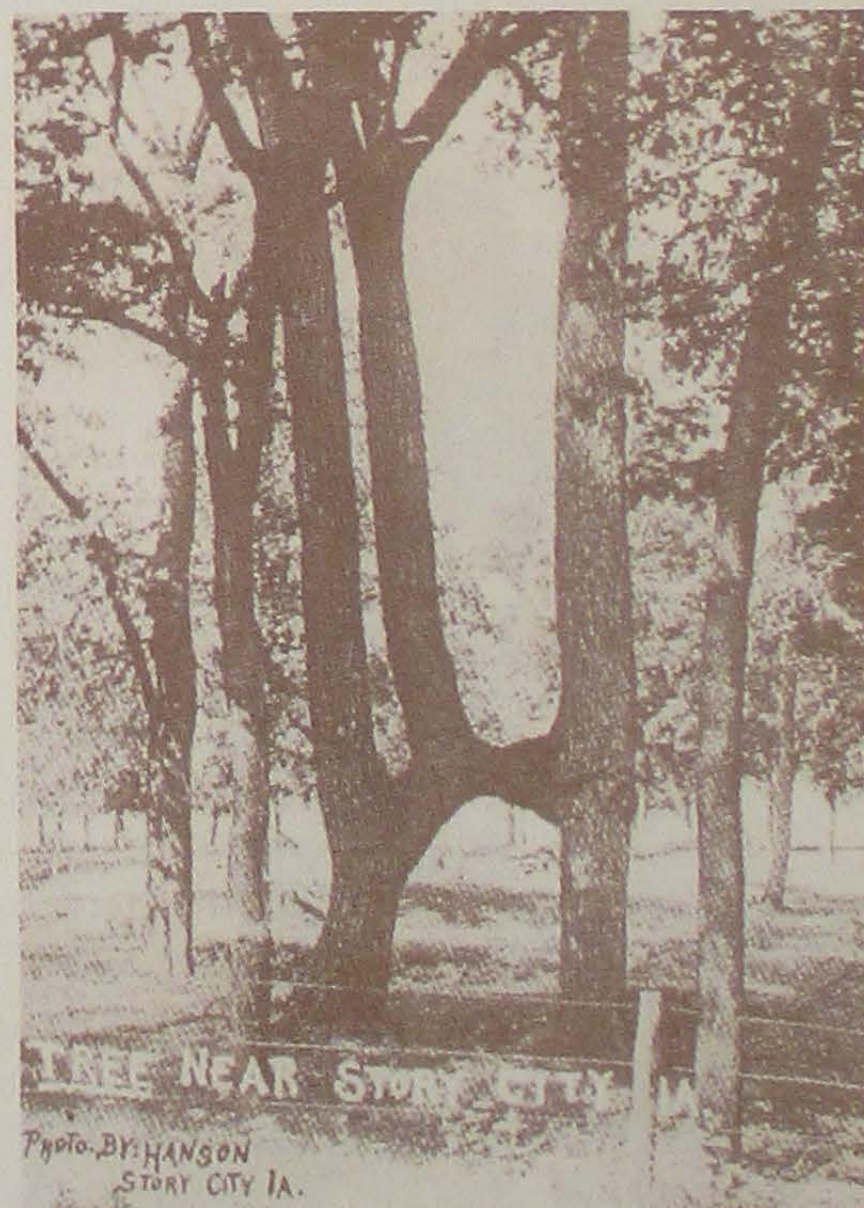
Even landmarks pass in time, however. Fourth of July storms and highwater this summer finally toppled what was left of the H-tree. A chain saw cut near the top of the American elm trunk revealed more than 200 rings, a true patriarch by local standards.

Red men who had never seen a white man first noticed the unusual shape of the two elms. White men, uncharacteristically, spared it as they cut entire forests to build their cities and railroads. The red men lived with and shared the bounty of the Cha Ca Gua valley for at least 10,000 years. The white settlers have been in the valley fewer than 200 years, but have seen and caused more changes in those few years than the valley had seen in the previous thousands.

The H-tree is gone. What will remain of our Chichaqua valley in another 100 years or even 50 years? Whatever remains, whatever happens, the H-tree will always be a part of the valley, a living entity which witnessed as tumultuous a period of 200 years as the Chichaqua has ever known, truly a landmark in history.



Mrs. W.H. Meeker, whose husband's name graces Meeker School in Ames, stands in the center of the H-tree prior to 1915. The site of the H-tree was a popular local gathering place for picnics and family get-togethers. Mrs. Ruth Jackson of Ames supplied the photo.



Lucille Tjernagel of Story City furnished this view of the H-tree taken from a postcard sold about 1915.



Alma Sampson of Story City supplied this photograph of herself leaning against the still-living trees in 1938.



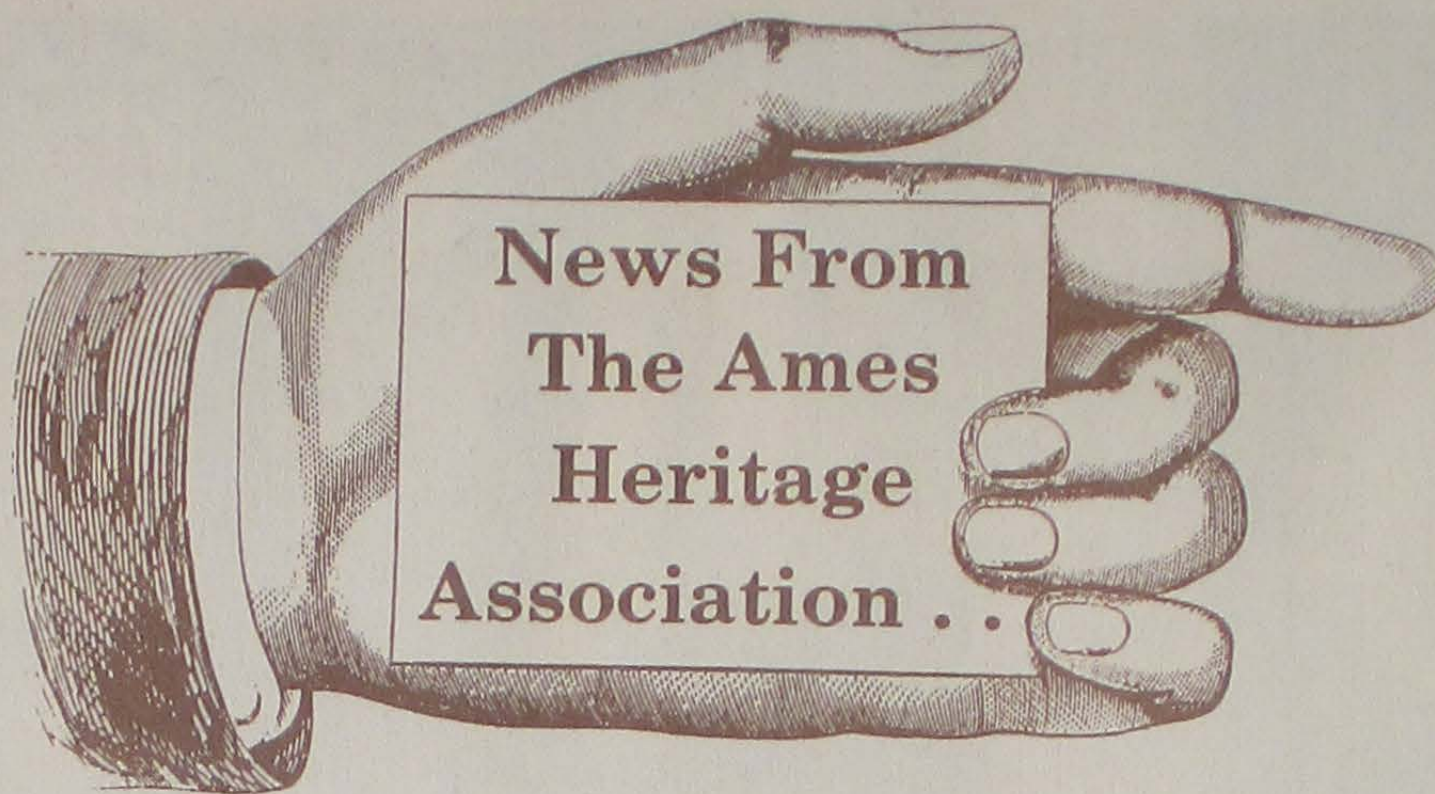
This photograph of the famous landmark, located seven miles northeast of Ames along the Skunk River, was taken by Rodney Fox of Ames about 1960 when the trees were still living, although struggling to survive.



The ravages of time and disease take their toll on the H-tree as it slowly dies. This 1970 photograph was supplied by Leroy Higgins of Roland.



The dead and rotting H—tree stands proudly just a few months before it fell to the ground on the 4th of July, 1986. This photograph, taken that spring, was furnished by Mrs. Bob Peterson of Story City.



News From The Ames Heritage Association...

Hoggatt School received a \$50 donation recently from Kelly Enterprises, also known as Suzanne Kelly's sixth grade class at Meeker School. The children formed the Kelley Enterprises corporation as a class investment project in learning how to make money. The "Board of Directors" met, and the "stockholders" voted on how to spend their investment money. As a tribute to former principal Lee Himan and his efforts to help the children grow and learn through the years, the students voted to donate a portion of their hard-earned dollars to Hoggatt School on the Meeker School grounds - a wonderful financial learning experience, recognition for a dedicated educator, and a unique contribution to a piece of Ames' history.

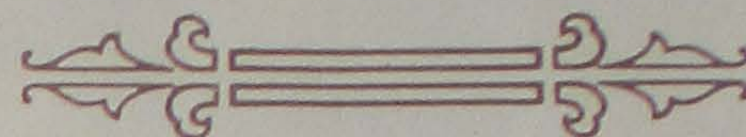
The Ames Heritage Association also received a \$1000 gift from the national organization of the Questors in response to a request submitted by Captain Greeley

chapter members. The funds, to be spent within the year, will be used to promote the educational aspects of Hoggatt School. Possible projects include new log seating in the outdoor classroom around the building, native prairie grass plantings, and the development of traveling kits relating Ames history from the 1860s.

The Pi Chapter of the Alpha Delta Kappa teachers' sorority in Ames contributed \$50 to be used towards Hoggatt School materials and/or teacher information packets.

The Board of Directors of the Ames Heritage Association would like to thank these generous individuals and organizations for their contributions to the projects of the AHA.

A reinforced wooden door at Hoggatt School has been installed. The new door, which cost \$289, will be more effective in preventing potential security problems at the school.



Ames Heritage Association Officers

President Lee Himan
1317 Scott Circle, Ames
292-3331

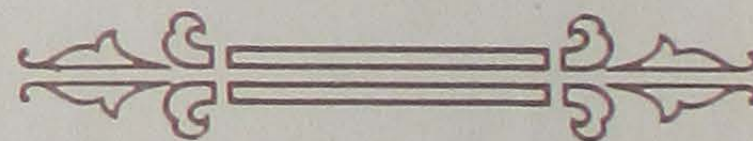
Vice-President Charles Kniker
2111 Ashmore Circle, Ames
292-9001

Secretary Bertlyn Johnston
1215 McKinley Drive, Ames
232-1640

Treasurer Jan Halverson
Route 1, Kelley
685-3238

The Ames Heritage Association meets the second Tuesday of every month September through May at 7:30 p.m. in the Community Room at the Ames Public Library, 515 Douglas Avenue.

The annual meeting is held the second Tuesday of January. Time and place will be announced.



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